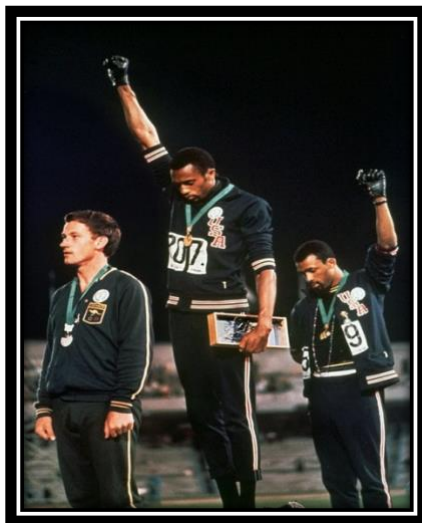


PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Tommie Smith

athlete, activist

"Tough times do not last, but tough people do" 1



Background Information

Born: June 6, 1944

Tommie Smith was born in Clarksville, Texas. He overcame some health challenges as a child, and began running track-and-field in high school. He set many track records at his school that are still unmatched over 50 years later. He also played basketball and football, and was the vice president of his senior class.

Smith received an athletic scholarship to San Jose State University. He continued to break records as a sprinter. Smith became famous after winning a gold medal at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Smith is seen in the center of the photograph, next to his teammate John Carlos, who is pictured on the right.

Smith's Resistance

Smith and other athletes wanted to boycott the 1968 Olympics. They wanted the Olympic Committee to make changes about segregation and the treatment of Black athletes. Smith eventually decided to compete in the Olympics, but he has a plan. He and his teammate, John Carlos, planned to protest if they won any medals. Smith went on to break the world record for the 200-meter sprint. Smith and Carlos won the gold and bronze medals. They carried out their plan, and protested on the podium. On live TV, the two teammates raised their fists in the air as an act of Black Power and protest. They were not wearing shoes to represent the bad conditions that Black people were experiencing in America.²

Achievements

Tommie Smith inspired a generation of athletes, including NFL players like Colin Kaepernick. Similar to Kaepernick, Smith and Carlos both faced major backlash for their actions. They were both banned from competing in future Olympic events.³ Today, Smith is remembered for his lasting contribution to the Civil Rights Movement. He set an example for how to peacefully protest in sports.

The iconic image of Smith and Carlos raising their fists is a symbol of Black Power and resistance. There is a statue of Smith and Carlos at the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. ⁴

Essential Questions

1. How has Tommie Smith inspired athletes and other people today?
2. Why do you think Smith and his teammate were banned from competing in future Olympic events?
3. ***“Tough times do not last, but tough people do”***
 - a. What is something tough you faced but persevered through?

1 Roy, George (Director) (1999). *Fists of Freedom: The Story of the '68 Games* (documentary).

2 John Carlos and Tommie Smith, 50 years later. (2018, October 3). Retrieved from <https://www.si.com/olympics/2018/10/03/john-carlos-tommie-smith-1968-olympics-black-power-salute>.

3 Bates, K. (2018, October 16). Those Raised Fists Still Resonate, 50 Years Later. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/10/16/657548752/those-raised-fists-still-resonate-50-years-later>

4 Armour, N. (2019, September 23). Opinion: 'We were wrong,' as USOPC finally do right by Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/nancy-armour/2019/09/23/olympics-tommie-smith-john-carlos-get-recognition-they-deserve/2423576001/>.